

# THE TRANSMISSION OF SANQU SONGS, WRITERS' REPUTATION, AND LITERATI NETWORK IN THE MID MING: LOCAL AND TRANS-LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS \*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The mid Ming is an extremely interesting and significant period in understanding the development of *sanqu* 散曲 (literally 'dispersed or individual songs'),<sup>1</sup> a kind of song verse in Chinese literature. After its so-called 'golden age' in the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368), *sanqu* went through a period of decline during the early decades of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in which we could find *sanqu* writings by only a few major writers such as Tang Shi 湯式 (fl.1383) and Zhu Youdun 朱有燬 (1374-1442). However, as scholars have observed, the 'revival' of the genre then took place around the second half of the fifteenth century and extended into the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Previous studies in western language on *sanqu* include Crump 1983 and 1993, Radtke 1984, Schlepp 1970, and more recently, Schlepp 2001. All of these studies, however, dealt almost exclusively with Yuan *sanqu* and very little has been discussed about the development of the genre beyond the Yuan dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Schlepp 2001, p.381; Liang Yang and Yang Dongfu 1995, p.143; Zhao Yishan 2003, pp.141-145.

The idea of this 'revival' may be supported by the enormous number of songs and writers in the Ming. *Quan Ming sanqu* 全明散曲 (hereafter *QMSQ*) collects 10,606 *xiaoling* 小令 (short songs), and 2,064 *taoshu* 套數 (song sets), far exceeding what we have for the Yuan and Qing dynasty. According to *Quan Yuan sanqu* 全元散曲, we have 3,853 *xiaoling* and 457 *taoshu* in the Yuan, and according to *Quan Qing sanqu* 全清散曲, 3,214 *xiaoling* and 1,166 *taoshu* in the Qing. It has been pointed out that a more accurate count of Qing dynasty *sanqu* should be around 1700 *xiaoling* and 800 *taoshu*. See Liang Yang and Yang Dongfu 1995, pp.268-9. The number of Ming *sanqu* writers (406) is also the double of that in the Yuan (187) and the Qing dynasty (around 200, according to the amendment to the numbers in *Quan Qing sanqu* made by Liang and Yang 1995, p.269).

This revival of the *sanqu* genre in the mid Ming witnessed the emergence of a huge number of *sanqu* writers. In modern scholarship, these songwriters are usually classified into either the Northern or the Southern writers. Such a binary classification, however, fails to capture the movement of texts as well as the interaction between clusters of writers. To capture this process of *sanqu* writing, we need to rethink ways to account for and describe these writers. In this paper, I will first propose a new approach by considering the production, transmission, and consumption of songs from a local perspective. I argue that the emergence of these writers in the mid Ming took place as a distinctively local phenomenon, and that we are able to find several local centers of *sanqu* writing in this period.

Next, I will discuss the trans-local transmission of songs among these various local centers and explore how writers from different parts of the mid-Ming empire were connected through the formation of literary communities trans-locally. How did people from one region get to know about *sanqu* songs and writers from another area? How were texts circulated? Whose name was transmitted and known beyond one's local circle? Focusing on two case studies of the circulation of songs originally composed in Shandong and Shaanxi respectively, I examine how songs were transmitted locally and trans-locally, and how reputation traveled beyond these local regions through literati network.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF *SANQU* SONGS IN THE MID MING: FROM NORTH-SOUTH DIVISION TO LOCAL CENTERS

To illustrate the vibrant revival of *sanqu* in the mid Ming, let us begin by revisiting an often cited passage by the late Ming critic Wang Jide 王驥德 (d. 1623) in his *Qulü* 曲律 (On Rules of Songs):

Among recent writers of songs,<sup>3</sup> for northern songs we have Principal Graduate Kang Hai 康海 (*zi* Duishan, 1475-1540) and *Taishi*<sup>4</sup> Wang Jiushi 王九思 (*zi* Meipi, 1468-1551) from Guanzhong, Principal Graduate Yang Shen 楊慎 (*zi* Sheng'an, 1488-1559) from Shu, *Taishi*<sup>5</sup> Chen Yi 陳沂 (*zi*

<sup>3</sup> The term *ci* is commonly used in the Ming to refer to *sanqu* songs.

<sup>4</sup> General term for staff members in the Hanlin Academy. Wang was taken into the Academy as a Hanlin Bachelor (*shujishi* 庶吉士) and later appointed the Examining Editor (*jiantao* 檢討).

<sup>5</sup> Chen served as a junior compiler (*bianxiu* 編修) in the Hanlin Academy.

Shiting, 1469-1538), *Taishi* <sup>6</sup> Hu Rujia 胡汝嘉 (*zi* Qiuyu, *jinshi* 1553) and recluse Xu Lin 徐霖 (*zi* Ranxian, 1462-1538) from Jinling, *shangbao* <sup>7</sup> Li Kaixian 李開先 (*zi* Bohua, 1502-1568) and Assistant Prefect <sup>8</sup> Feng Weimin (*zi* Haifu, 1511-1580) from Shandong, Case Reviewer <sup>9</sup> Chang Lun (*zi* Louju, 1493-1526) from Shanxi, recluse Wang Pan 王磐 (*zi* Xilou, ca.1455-after 1529) from Weiyang, <sup>10</sup> District Assistant Wang Tian 王田 (*zi* Shungeng) from Ji'nan, and [Secretary in] the Ministry of Rites Yang Xunji 楊循吉 (*zi* Nanfeng, 1456-1544) from Wuzhong. [The style of] Kang is rich but untidy; Wang is alluring yet well-arranged; Yang charming and flowery; Chen and Hu forthright and free; Xu free flowing but not yet polished; Li virile and straightforward; Feng full of luxuriant talent, but flaws appear at times; Chang full of courage yet lacks polishing; Xilou specialized in [writing] short tunes, [his style is] graceful and always refined; Shungeng often reaches close to human feelings, and is also competent in bantering and mockery; Yang is more boorish and rash. These gentlemen occasionally wrote southern tunes, but they were all not masters in it. As for southern songs we have Chen Duo 陳鐸 (*zi* Dasheng, ca.1460-ca.1521) and Jin Luan 金鑾 (*zi* Zaiheng, ca.1486-ca.1575) from Jinling, Shen Shi 沈仕 (*zi* Qingmen, 1488-1565) from Wulin, <sup>11</sup> Tang Yin 唐寅 (*zi* Bohu, 1470-1524), Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (*zi* Zhishan, 1460-1526), and Liang Chengyu 梁辰魚 (*zi* Bolong, 1519-1591) from Wu; Chen and Liang were the most well-known. The *xiaoling* by Tang, Jin and Shen are all very graceful and refined. Zhu's *xiaoling* writings are fine too, but his longer pieces are just mediocre. Chen and Liang wrote mostly song suites, which well displayed their talent and ability; but conventional expressions and clichés also abound [in their writings], and [in that respect, Chen and Liang] were almost equal. As for the rest, I have not read all their writings, and therefore would not venture to comment on who is superior or inferior.

<sup>6</sup> Hu also served as a junior compiler in the Hanlin Academy.

<sup>7</sup> *Shangbao* refers to the Seals Office, but as far as I know, Li Kaixian did not hold an official post under that agency. Before he was forced to retire in 1541, Li was the Vice Minister in the Court of Imperial Sacrifices in charge of the College of Translators.

<sup>8</sup> *Biejia* is an alternative term for *tongpan* 通判.

<sup>9</sup> *Tingping* is an official term used in the Han dynasty equivalent to *pingshi* 評事 (Case Reviewer). Chang Lun served as *pingshi* at the Court of Judicial Review (*Dalisi* 大理寺).

<sup>10</sup> Alternative name for Yangzhou.

<sup>11</sup> Alternative name for Hangzhou.

近之為詞者，北詞則關中康狀元對山、王太史漢陂，蜀則楊狀元升菴，金陵則陳太史石亭、胡太史秋宇、徐山人髯仙，山東則李尚寶伯華，馮別駕海浮，山西則常廷評樓居，維揚則王山人西樓，濟南則王邑佐舜耕，吳中則楊儀部南峰。康富而蕪，王艷而整，楊俊而葩，陳、胡爽而放，徐暢而未汰，李豪而率，馮才氣勃勃，時見紕繆，常多俠而寡馴，西樓工短調、翩翩都雅，舜耕多近人情、兼善諧謔，楊較粗莽。諸君子間作南調，則皆非當家也。南則金陵陳大聲、金在衡，武林沈青門，吳唐伯虎、祝希哲、梁伯龍；而陳、梁最著。唐、金、沈小令，並斐亹有致。祝小令亦佳，長則草草。陳、梁多大套，頗著才情；然多俗意陳語，伯仲間耳。餘未悉見，不敢定其甲乙也。<sup>12</sup>

In this passage, Wang Jide gives an account of what he calls the “recent writers” active during the mid-Ming period. He discusses these writers in two separate groups: those who wrote northern songs and those who wrote southern songs. This distinction was important in the mid Ming which was the pivotal period in the development of *qu* 曲 (a collective term for both *sanqu* songs and drama) that witnessed the rise of the southern songs (*nanqu* 南曲) and the decline of the northern songs (*beiqu* 北曲).<sup>13</sup>

This passage by Wang is often cited by modern scholars as a piece of evidence showing that a North-South division existed among the songwriters during this period. In modern scholarship, it is now a common practice to divide *sanqu* writers of the mid-Ming dynasty using such a binary classification. The application of this North-South classification, however, is by no means a clear-cut issue. A writer may be characterized as belonging to the ‘northern’ group in one study, and as belonging to the ‘southern’ in another, in part due to the ambiguity and confusion in what is meant by ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’. This is reflected in the different terms used to describe these writers, for example, ‘northern/southern’ (*beifang* 北方 /*nanfang* 南方), ‘northern/southern schools’ (*beipai* 北派 /*nanpai* 南派), or ‘northern/southern *qu*’ (*beiqu/nanqu*) writers.<sup>14</sup> It could refer to the

<sup>12</sup> Wang Jide 1983, pp.218-9.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Zheng Qian 鄭騫 sees the hundred years from 1465 to 1567, covering the four reign periods Chenghua, Hongzhi, Zhengde, and Jiajing, as the turning point of this development. See Zheng Qian 1972, p.248. See also Dolby 1976, p.89, and Gong Pengcheng 1994, pp.381-434.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of such classifications, see recent histories of *sanqu* such as Li Changji 1991, Yang Chunqiu 1992, Wang Xingqi 1999, and Zhao Yishan 2007. For a

regional north and south, the difference between the northern and southern songs, or even a more elusive and debatable northern or southern style. Whether a writer writes a certain genre or style of songs does not necessarily correspond to his origins. A *sanqu* writer, regardless of his regional origins, could write either northern or southern songs, and in northern or southern style, and very often, one is capable of both.<sup>15</sup> Despite these issues, the North-South classification is popular for its advantage in providing a structure to literary histories and in allowing one to make broad observations on literary developments.

However, such a general division between the north and the south tells us very little about the actual production, transmission, and consumption of songs, which was very much a communal and social act and an experience involving a community of writers, readers and audiences, and commentators. Now, if we reconsider Wang's passage cited above, there is another aspect in it that is very much unexplored. It is noteworthy that Wang pointed out the native place of every writer he listed. I suggest that one may indeed therefore read this passage as a preliminary mapping of the major songwriters in mid-Ming China.

If we traced the individual communities centered around these writers, we can start to see that this so-called 'revival' of *sanqu* in mid Ming took place distinctively as a local phenomenon. For example, I have argued elsewhere that in the first half of sixteenth-century north China, activities related to songs and drama were mainly found in local communities centered on retired or dismissed officials such as Wang Jiushi and Kang Hai in Shaanxi, and Li Kaixian in Shandong. Recently, I have extended this approach in studying the first generation of Nanjing songwriters such as Chen Duo and Xu Lin who emerged in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Other local centers of song production worth looking at include Suzhou with writers such as Tang Yin and Zhu Yunming, and Yunnan where Yang Shen spent his years in exile.

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general discussion on the various classifications of 'schools' (*liupai* 流派) in *sanqu*, see Lü Weifen and Huang Hui 1999, pp.1-67.

<sup>15</sup> I believe we can trace the formation of such binary classification and the confusion in the use of various terms to earlier studies by pioneer *sanqu* scholars such as Ren Ne 任訥. However, since this is only tangentially relevant to the current paper, I shall pursue this issue on another occasion.

<sup>16</sup> See Tan 2006 and 2008.

My emphasis on the local centers by no means suggests that the transmission of songs was restricted only to the local level. Rather, I believe such a local perspective lays the foundation for us to explore the trans-local dynamics among the various local centers of songwriting in the mid Ming.

### 3. TRANS-LOCAL TRANSMISSION AND LITERATI NETWORK

To illustrate how songs were produced and transmitted within and beyond the local regions, let us turn to the social context surrounding one particular set of a hundred songs written in Shandong by Li Kaixian, a sixteenth-century *sanqu* writer and dramatist well-known for his play *Baojianji* 寶劍記 (The Story of the Precious Sword).<sup>17</sup> After being forced to retire from office in 1541, Li returned to his native place, Zhangqiu 章邱 county in Shandong. Li Kaixian then wrote this set of a hundred songs in 1544, three years into his retirement.

This set of one hundred songs provides us with an interesting case to study trans-local transmission because a Qing dynasty hand-copied manuscript of this work preserves a long list of colophons containing invaluable information on the circulation and reception of these songs. Furthermore, the manuscript also includes a list of the biographical information (names, native place, and official posts) of these colophon writers at the end of the colophons.<sup>18</sup> Based on information recorded in the colophons, we know that this set of songs also generated at least 586 matching songs from various literati writers.<sup>19</sup>

In his preface, Li Kaixian gave an account of the context that inspired him to compose the hundred songs, stating that a singing boy happened

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<sup>17</sup> For biographical studies on Li Kaixian, see Bu Jian 1989, Iwaki Hideo 1989, and Zeng Yuanwen 1991. A brief introduction in English is provided by Lee Hwa-Chou in *DMB*, pp.835-7.

<sup>18</sup> The Qing dynasty manuscript (number 14805) is kept in the National Library of China. The valuable list of biographical information was left out in Lu Gong 1957, vol. 3, pp.870-902, but is now made available in Bu Jian's new edition of Li's complete works, *LKXQJ*, pp.1225-30. In consideration that the original manuscript edition is not paginated and is generally inaccessible to most readers, all references to the one hundred songs in this paper refer to the *LKXQJ* edition and any differences will be explained in footnotes.

<sup>19</sup> For a full discussion of the literary aspects of this set of songs and the social production of its matching songs, see Tan 2006, pp.145-168.

to visit Shandong and hence he wrote the songs for the boy to perform.<sup>20</sup> But how did these *sanqu* songs then circulate beyond this immediate context? The first colophon to these hundred songs provides us with some interesting information:

For Li Kaixian, when his words appear, people trust them; when his lyrics appear, people spread them around. In his writing of the [hundred songs to the tune of] *Bangzhuangtai*, even before the manuscript was ready, voices singing these lyrics had already filled the alleys! Many people came to ask for or borrow a copy, and it is hard to fulfill such social obligations. Li therefore took an extra copy and gave it to the printer. Those who would sing and match these songs will soon be found all over the eastern lands.<sup>21</sup> How could it be restricted only to the alleys?

中麓李子，言出而人信之，詞出而人傳之，其為傍粧臺也，稿尚未脫，歌喉已溢里巷中矣。索借者眾，應酬為難，因取副墨，壽之木工，歌而和之者將遍東國，獨里巷也而已哉？<sup>22</sup>

This tells us that the songs were actively sung and performed, at least in Li's home village, but as Xie's colophon suggested above, there was also a practical need to put the *sanqu* songs into print to meet the growing demand.

Li's hundred songs were very popular and widely known among the literati at that time.<sup>23</sup> The Qing dynasty hand-copied manuscript shows that these songs gathered a total of 95 colophons signed by 86 writers<sup>24</sup>, including famous literary figures such as Wang Jiusi, Yang Shen, and Feng Weina 馮惟訥 (*hao* Shaozhou 少洲, 1512-1572), but also lesser known ones including many who are little mentioned or who have been invisible in literary histories. Some of these colophons were comments left by literati after reading the text. We can also find later comments

<sup>20</sup> Li Kaixian, "Zhonglu xiaoling yin" 《中麓小令》引, *LKXQJ*, p.1189. This preface is titled "Zhonglu shanren xiaoling yin" 中麓山人小令引 in the Qing dynasty hand-copied manuscript.

<sup>21</sup> The "eastern lands" refers to Shandong region.

<sup>22</sup> *LKXQJ*, p.1204. Xie published a *sanqu* collection titled *Dongcun yuefu* 東村樂府, prefaced by Li Kaixian.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see the colophons by Chen Taifeng 陳太峯 and Bai Dongchuan 白東川 in *LKXQJ*, pp.1206-7, and 1211.

<sup>24</sup> For the colophons, see *LKXQJ*, pp.1204-25. The following writers contributed more than one colophon: Fang Liangjiang 方兩江 (2), Cui Daiping 崔岱平 (2), Zhang Nanming 張南溟 (2), Kang Weibin 康渭濱 (3), Wang Jiusi (2), Gu Qiushan 顧秋山 (2), Zhang Longgang 張龍岡 (2), and Bai Dongchuan (2).

responding to earlier ones, showing that they were perhaps comments accumulated in a single copy.<sup>25</sup> There were also other colophons that appear to have been taken from elsewhere, for example, the prefaces to the various printings of the work.<sup>26</sup> Owing to this long list of colophons, we can now know the people who have read these songs and expressed their views. This information is significant because it allows us to plot how far and widely these songs were circulated.

While some colophons might have been written in a more immediate context after the songs were written in 1544,<sup>27</sup> the last dated colophon was written in 1546, which tells us that these colophons were not written on one occasion, but over a period of at least two to three years. From the colophons, we know that the text was circulated widely, not only to nearby northern regions such as Shaanxi 陝西 and Henan 河南, and the capital in Beijing 北京, but also to Kunshan 崑山 in the south and more remote areas such as Yunnan 雲南.<sup>28</sup> How did the one hundred songs come to gather this enormous number of colophons by numerous literati in various places?

There are several layers of transmission. First, we have the people who might have watched or listened to the performance of the singing of Li Kaixian's one hundred songs when they were first completed, or read the first manuscript of Li as it was copied. It is noteworthy that among the 86 colophon writers, 38 were from Shandong and 15 of them came from the same county (Zhangqiu) as Li Kaixian. In addition, a number of colophon writers who were natives of other provinces held offices in Shandong at that time. This therefore suggests that there was a strong 'local' component in the initial transmission of this set of *sanqu* songs, and that the activity was largely a regional or local one centered in Shandong.

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<sup>25</sup> For example, the twenty-fourth colophon writer Liang Dongan 梁洞菴 agreed with the comments made by the twenty-first colophon writer, Zhang Yongchuan 張甬川. See *LKXQJ*, pp.1208-9.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the colophon by Wang Jiushi is the same as his preface for *Nanqu ciyun*, a combined publishing of Li's original hundred songs and Wang's matching songs to them.

<sup>27</sup> The twenty-ninth colophon writer Lu Shen 陸深 passed away in 1544. Therefore, if the colophons were arranged chronologically, those before Lu's were all written within the same year, 1544, in which the hundred songs were composed.

<sup>28</sup> Yang Shen, then in exile in Yunnan, also received a copy from Li. See Yang's colophon, *LKXQJ*, p.1211.



Among the group of colophon writers, seven were co-members of Li Kaixian's local songwriting club named Fuwentang 富文堂, the 'Hall Abundant in Literature.' They were Xie Jiurong 謝九容 (*hao* Dongcun 東村, ?- before 1551)<sup>29</sup>, Xia Wenxian 夏文憲 (*juren* 1528,<sup>30</sup> *hao* Hongshan 龔山<sup>31</sup>), Gu Jizong 谷繼宗 (*hao* Shaodai 少岱, *jinshi* 1526),<sup>32</sup> Yuan Chongmian 袁崇冕 (1487-1566, *hao* Xiye 西野),<sup>33</sup> Yang Ying 楊盈 (*hao* Shuangxi 雙溪, 1483-1558, *juren* 1507),<sup>34</sup> Chen De'an 陳德安 (*juren* 1525, *hao* Taifeng 泰峯), and Jiang Dacheng 姜大成 (1494-1551, *juren* 1537, *hao* Songjian 松澗).<sup>35</sup>

If we study the colophons carefully, it is striking to note that six of them were among the first fifteen colophon writers, and that Xie Jiurong's and Xia Wenxian's colophons were even placed as the first and third.<sup>36</sup> If, as mentioned earlier, we believe that the colophons were arranged roughly in chronological order, then it would appear that Li's *sanqu* were first circulated among the members of his *qu* circle. These were people who met with Li regularly to write and read *sanqu*, and listen to the performances of *sanqu*.

This constituted the primary layer of transmission. The circulation of the text, however, was not restricted to the Shandong *qu* circle. The text also traveled beyond the local region to neighboring provinces, and Li's

<sup>29</sup> Xie was only briefly mentioned at the end of the biographical note on Yuan Chongmian in *Zhangqiu xianzhi*, 6: 39a. It was said that Xie wrote 2 *juan* of *sanqu* and, just like Yuan Chongmian, he did not attain *juren*.

<sup>30</sup> Same year as Li Kaixian. For biographical information about Xia, see *Zhangqiu xianzhi*, 6: 24b.

<sup>31</sup> Also the name of a mountain east of Zhangqiu.

<sup>32</sup> Gu once temporarily lost his sight and stayed at Li's place for a period of time. See Li Kaixian, "He Gu Shaodai sangmu chongming xu" 賀谷少岱喪目重明序, *LKXQJ*, pp.415-6. Li Kaixian mentioned that Gu was once excessively involved in writing *Xuanji ciyun* 璇璣詞韻, which probably was a rhyme dictionary. See Li Kaixian 1959, p.275.

<sup>33</sup> For biographical information of Yuan, see *Zhangqiu xianzhi*, 6: 38b-39a, and Wang Shizhen 1982, pp.336-7. See also Li Kaixian, "Yuzuo xiangbin Xiye Yuanweng muzhiming" 豫作鄉賓西野袁翁墓誌銘, *LKXQJ*, pp.590-1.

<sup>34</sup> *Zhangqiu xianzhi*, 6: 25a.

<sup>35</sup> Li Kaixian, "Tunliu zhixian Jiang jun hezang muzhiming" 屯留知縣姜君合葬墓誌銘, *LKXQJ*, pp.614-7.

<sup>36</sup> The order of the colophon writers is as follows: Xie Dongcun (1), Xia Hongshan (3), Gu Shaodai (6), Yuan Xiye (12), Yang Shuangxi (13), and Chen Taifeng (15). The only one whose colophon was placed much later in the order is Jiang Songjian (57).

friends in Shaanxi formed the next layer of readers and colophon-writers.

Li Kaixian once made a trip to Shaanxi in 1531 to visit the two senior masters Wang Jiusi and Kang Hai. By the time Li wrote these 100 songs in 1544, Kang Hai had passed away earlier in 1541, but the other members of the Shaanxi community such as Kang Hao 康浩 (1479-1560, *jinshi* 1511), Wang Jiusi, Zhang Zhidao 張治道 (1487-1556, *jinshi* 1514), and Hu Shi 胡侍 (1492-1553) were all very much involved in this case. Wang Jiusi and Kang Hao not only wrote colophons for Li, but each also came up with a hundred matching songs to Li's original.<sup>37</sup> Zhang and Hu already knew about and had highly praised Li's earlier *sanqu* in the early 1530s. We know that Zhang had remained in contact with Li since their meeting in Shaanxi, as seen in a number of Zhang's writings to Li.<sup>38</sup> Zhang also wrote ten matching songs for Li's hundred songs, but they are no longer extant. As for Hu Shi, it appears from the evidence we have that Hu was not actively involved in the actual writing of *qu*, but only participated in the *qu* gatherings organized by the above mentioned literati.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, Hu was also very interested in songs and drama and some of his views on Yuan *qu* and southern and northern songs were cited later by Li Kaixian.<sup>40</sup> Apparently, these literati from Shaanxi continued to be a part of Li's larger *qu* community, reading and writing colophons and matching songs for Li's one hundred *xiaoling* more than a decade after their initial meeting in Shaanxi. What we see here is that the transmission of songs on this level depended on the direct literati network between the two local communities in Shandong and Shaanxi established by Li Kaixian during his visit in 1531.

<sup>37</sup> I have not found any records about Kang Hao's direct associations with Li Kaixian, except that Kang once went to Shandong during the Zhengde period on an official trip. See Wang Jiusi's tomb inscription for Kang He, in Wang Jiusi, *Meipi xuji*, lower *juan*: 64a.

<sup>38</sup> For example, see Zhang Zhidao, "Zhonglu pian wei Li Bohua fu," 中麓篇為李伯華賦 in idem, *Jiajing ji*, 2:4b-5a; "Ji Li Bohua" 寄李伯華, *ibid.*, 3:18b; and "Wen Li Zhonglu Yuanting sheng jici" 聞李中麓園亭盛寄此, 5:15b-16a.

<sup>39</sup> Hu Shi, in his colophon, lamented his lack of musical knowledge and his inability to sing *sanqu* songs. See *LKXQJ*, p.1211. This might suggest that Hu did not have the required knowledge to take part in the writing of *qu*.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Hu Shi's section on "Yuanqu" 元曲 was later cited by Li in his preface to *Zhang Xiaoshan xiaoling*, cf. Hu Shi 1936, p.35, and *LKXQJ*, p.439.

In addition, there were also other literati who received copies sent directly to them from Li, and these were probably his close friends and acquaintances. However, this by no means marks the end of the transmission. There were others who in turn received the texts indirectly from these primary readers. They either read the texts or watched the performance of the songs with their friends on various occasions.<sup>41</sup>

More interestingly, the text also traveled with some of the primary readers who possessed a copy. One carrier of the songs was Yang Xuan 楊選 (*hao Dongjiang* 東江, 1512-1563, *jinshi* 1544):

On my mission to the south,<sup>42</sup> I obtained a volume of your exquisite work, and I brought it to Nanyang [in Henan]. There, I met Prefectural Judge Bai Jianzhai, a native of Nangong [in Hebei], and we read your work together. Later, I returned from Dianzhong (Yunnan), and I passed by Nanyang again. I heard that Jianzhai really loves these songs and could not bear to take his hands off them...

余南使，得佳製一冊，攜至南陽，遇南宮白健齋節推，與觀之，後余回自滇中，復過南陽，聞健齋愛是曲，不忍釋手.....<sup>43</sup>

Here, we see how the text followed Yang to Henan. As the texts traveled, they were also multiplied in the process. One manuscript or printed edition of the hundred songs could then be copied to make multiple ones, which further spurred the transmission of the songs. Zhang Yingji 張應吉 (*hao Dongquan* 東泉, *juren* 1522) told Li in his colophon,

I only brought one volume of your great work to this place, and those who saw it competed in spreading it and copying it, so now it is already widespread in the Guanzhong region.

高詞止攜一冊至是，見者爭傳錄之，已遍關中矣。<sup>44</sup>

If we pay attention to the backgrounds and careers of these colophon writers, one can begin to better understand the structure of Li's network as reflected in it. This is far from a well-defined literary school or group. Rather, what we see here is the social production, transmission, and consumption of a genre through the literati network. Among the

<sup>41</sup> For example, see Zhang Yongchuan's colophon, *LKXQJ*, p.1208.

<sup>42</sup> Yang Xuan was once sent on a mission to Yunnan. See *Zhangqiu xianzhi*, 6:24b.

<sup>43</sup> *LKXQJ*, p.1215.

<sup>44</sup> *LKXQJ*, p.1211.

colophon writers, there were those who attained the *jinshi* degree or passed the provincial examination in the same year as Li Kaixian,<sup>45</sup> those who were his colleagues in the capital,<sup>46</sup> and also those who newly attained *jinshi* in the year 1544 when the songs were written.<sup>47</sup>

The above case study illustrates how the literati network served as an important mechanism for the production, transmission, and consumption of *qu* writings.

Many of the colophon writers or authors of the matching pieces were not known for their writings in *sanqu*. It would be difficult to argue whether all of the matching and writing of colophons for Li's songs happened purely because of the literary interests of these writers. This is what we may call the social production of *sanqu*. There were people who participated in the reading and writing of *sanqu* only because it became a social event in their lives.

The overwhelming responses to Li's writings beyond the local level have to be read against the social world of Li Kaixian. Li appeared to have a gigantic social network, and as one scholar has calculated, he might have had around five hundred close acquaintances.<sup>48</sup> In his late years, even the gregarious Li would complain of the incessant visits of guests and the excessive parties, and have to admit that he needed to reduce his social activities.<sup>49</sup> It was Li Kaixian, a retired scholar-official

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<sup>45</sup> There were at least eleven of them who were in the same class of 1529 as Li Kaixian. They are Zeng Xian 曾銑, Sun Guanghui 孫光輝, Ye Hong 葉洪, Zuo Jie 左傑, Li Shen 李紳, Guo Zonggao 郭宗臯, Chen Ding 陳錠, Luo Hongxian 羅洪先, Huangfu Pang 皇甫汙, Hu Shi, and Wu Mengqi 吳孟祺. Luo Hongxian is a well-known thinker of the Wang Yangming school. See *DMB*, pp.980-4. Zhang Shunchen and Xia Wenxian passed the provincial examination in the same year as Li in 1528.

<sup>46</sup> See the example of one of the colophon writers, Ouyang Duo 歐陽鐸, in *LKXQJ*, p.1210.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Yang Xuan and Chen Ganyu 陳甘雨.

<sup>48</sup> Bu Jian, "Foreword" to *LKXQJ*, p.8.

<sup>49</sup> In what appears to be meant as a poster pasted on his doors, Li had an interestingly straightforward yet light-hearted account of why he decided to cut down on entertaining guests after his recovery from illness. While Li was ostensibly declining his guests, a reader may also very well read it as Li's boasting of his enormous social network. See Li Kaixian, "Binghou gaojian yingchou mentie" 病後告減應酬門帖, in idem, *Li Zhonglu xianjuji*, juan 12, unpaginated, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* edition, pp.375-6. We know that it was written in Li's late years because in it, he mentioned that he was nearly seventy years old. This piece of writing is not found in every edition of *Xianjuji*, and is also not included in *LKXQJ*.

with a wide social network, who brought his own *qu* writings out of the local context in Zhangqiu to a wider community of readers.

#### 4. LOCAL OR NATIONAL: LAYERS OF WRITERS' REPUTATION

Literary histories can only list major names. We would remember that in Wang Jide's passage cited above, only one or two representative names were cited from each region. However, once we go deeper into these individual local centers and work on the reception of *sanqu* songs on the local level, we then encounter many more names around these major figures.

We have seen in the previous section how the songs of Li Kaixian was first transmitted within a close circle of friends, some of whom were members of the local songwriting club in his home village. These other writers might have been celebrated figures in the local region, but many of them appeared to only possess some local forms of fame, which did not necessarily translate into the wider framework which forms the basis for our later understanding of the period. As a result, they were invisible in the larger framework of literary histories, and have therefore remained obscure to us. A number of questions can be asked: How was reputation transmitted? How did people get to know about *sanqu* writers in another part of China? Whose name was transmitted trans-locally, and why?<sup>50</sup>

In the case of Li's one hundred songs, we can see that Li Kaixian was undoubtedly the center of the entire process, with all the colophons and matching songs addressed to him. The reputation of the author was enhanced through the process of transmission. The situation, however, might be different for a less famous writer or someone with a more limited literati network. In this section, I will explore the different layers of writers' reputation through a case study of a series of matching songs within and across two local centers. This series of matching songs developed within the Shaanxi *sanqu* community, and eventually traveled beyond it to the Yunnan region in three stages:

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<sup>50</sup> My discussion on the transmission of writers' reputation in this section has benefited from a stimulating conversation with Craig Clunas on the local reputation of Nanjing songwriters and painters. Clunas also discusses this point in his recent book. See Clunas 2007, esp. pp.134-6.

*Stage One: From Longqu to Kang Hai and Wang Jiushi in Shaanxi*

The Shaanxi community was centered around two major writers, Wang Jiushi and Kang Hai, who were both cashiered because of alleged associations with the notorious eunuch Liu Jin 劉瑾 (1451-1510).<sup>51</sup> In the songs by Wang and Kang, a literatus by the name of Longqu 龍渠 appeared several times.

Longqu is most probably the literary name of Xie Chaoxuan 謝朝宣 (*jinsi* 1493) who was also a native of Shaanxi.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, none of Longqu's original *sanqu* songs were preserved. Interestingly, however, from the *sanqu* collections of Wang and Kang, we do know that both of them wrote multiple matching songs to a particular song or set of songs by Longqu written to the tune of *Qingjiangyin* 清江引.<sup>53</sup>

Although Longqu's original is now lost, we can gather some information about its specific form by looking at the template which Kang and Wang followed in their matching songs. The template requires the use of specific rhyme characters, *guan* 管, *san* 散, *fan* 飯, and *lan* 懶 on its first, second, fourth and fifth lines respectively. To illustrate this, let us look at one of Kang Hai's matching songs; the words in bold showing the rhyme characters which Kang followed from Longqu's original:

<sup>51</sup> For biographical studies on Kang Hai, see Han Jiegen 1993, Yagisawa Hajime 1959, pp.109-59, and most recently, Jin Ningfen 2004. In comparison, biographical studies on Wang Jiushi have been scarce, and most derive from Li Kaixian's biography of Wang. See Li Kaixian, "Meipi Wang Jiantao zhuan" 漢陂王檢討傳, *LKXQJ*, pp.763-8, and his later supplement to it, *ibid.*, pp.800-2. Brief introductions to Wang Jiushi and Kang Hai in English are available in *DMB*, pp.1366-7, and 692-4 respectively. See also Wilkerson 1992, which has individual chapters on Kang Hai and Wang Jiushi.

<sup>52</sup> Xie's literary collection is titled *Longqu wengao* 龍渠文稿. See *Shaanxi tongzhi*, 75:54b. Also, in the writings of Zhang Zhidao, we find several references to a certain Xie Longqu 謝龍渠. See for example, Zhang, "Qiuri tong Xie Longqu xiansheng Lu Renfu binxiang sanbu dongcheng kanju gui ji Longqu xiansheng" 秋日同謝龍渠先生盧仁夫賓相散步東城看菊歸寄龍渠先生, in *idem*, *Zhang Taiwei shiji*, 8:15b. For biographical information on Xie Chaoxuan, see *Shaanxi tongzhi*, 57:18b.

<sup>53</sup> *QMSQ*, pp.863-5, 921-2, and 1139-40.

In the end, what matters?  
 One had better do away with all the luxury and  
 resplendence.  
 A few beams make me a careful  
 Peaceful nest,  
 Simple meals give me a full belly.  
 To reach for the highest achievements,<sup>54</sup>  
 My mind and body are just too sluggish for that.

事到頭來誰照管，  
 好把豪華散。  
 數椽安樂窩，<sup>55</sup>  
 一飽家常飯，  
 百尺竿頭心力懶。<sup>56</sup>

In Kang Hai's song collection *Pandong yuefu* 汴東樂府 (ca.1524), we can find three sets of a total of twenty-eight matching songs to Longqu's original, first a set of sixteen songs titled "Sishi ci Longqu yun" 四時次龍渠韻 (Songs on the Four Seasons, Matching Longqu's Rhyme), then a set of six titled "Youci" 又次 (Matching Again), and finally, another six songs titled "Guiqing" 閨情 (Boudoir Sentiment) which, though not specified as matching songs, also used the same template of rhyme characters and thus may be considered as such.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Wang Jiusi, a close friend of Kang Hai and the other leader of the local center of songs and drama in Shaanxi, also wrote a total of twenty-six matching songs in three sets to Longqu.<sup>58</sup>

There are striking similarities between the matching songs by Kang and Wang. Each wrote three successive sets of matching songs using this template. In addition, both of their second sets of matching songs were on historical figures, most clearly spelled out in Wang's set titled "Songs on the Past" (*yonggu* 詠古), and their third sets were both on boudoir sentiments. Moreover, some lines from their matching songs show signs of influence or borrowing from each other.<sup>59</sup> It may not be too farfetched to speculate that the matching sets were composed on

<sup>54</sup> Literally, 'the tip of a hundred-foot pole'.

<sup>55</sup> Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077) once named his residence the 'Anlewo' (Nest of Peace and Joy).

<sup>56</sup> *QMSQ*, p.1140.

<sup>57</sup> For these 28 matching songs, see Kang Hai, *Pandong yuefu*, 1:12a-14a; *QMSQ*, pp.1139-41.

<sup>58</sup> The three sets of songs are titled "Ci Longqu yun zayong" 次龍渠韻雜詠 (8 songs), "Zai ci qianyun yonggu" 再次前韻詠古 (10 songs) and "Ci Longqu yun zayong" 次龍渠韻雜詠 (8 songs) respectively. See Wang Jiusi, *Bishan yuefu*, "xiaoling" *juan*:7b-9a, and idem, *Yuefu shiyi*, "xiaoling" section:5b-6a; *QMSQ*, pp.863-5, and 921.

<sup>59</sup> Compare, for example, the last song in Kang's third set with the seventh song in Wang's third set. See *QMSQ*, pp.921 and 1141.

certain common social occasions or in direct response not only to Longqu, but to each other.

While the rhyme characters are followed strictly in all of their matching songs, Kang and Wang played with the various meanings of individual characters. For example, the character *guan* 管 was used in its different meanings such as ‘to care about’, ‘to manage’, ‘a flute’, and the historical figure Guan Zhong 管仲 (d.645 B.C.) in various songs. Wang Jiushi also added a feature to his second set of matching songs: the last line of each song which was required to rhyme using *lan* 懶 all ends with a standard phrase “fei shi lan” 非是懶 (is not lazy). It is noteworthy that three of Kang’s matching songs also used this format.

Since these matching songs were found in the *sanqu* collections of Kang and Wang which were printed around 1524 and 1529 respectively,<sup>60</sup> we know that these matching songs by Kang and Wang took place before 1530. However, the matching of songs was not limited by members of the immediate community in Shaanxi. The next time we find this particular template of the tune *Qingjiangyin* copied by another writer, it actually took place in an area far away from Shaanxi.

#### *Stage Two: From Kang Hai in Shaanxi to Yang Shen in Yunnan*

Around the same time that Kang Hai and Wang Jiushi established themselves as major writers of songs and drama in Shaanxi in the 1520s, we find another community of writers around Yang Shen, a well-known figure in the Ming.<sup>61</sup> However, unlike the cases of Li Kaixian, or Kang and Wang where we find literary communities formed in the home villages of these discharged officials, this took place not in Yang’s native place Sichuan. Yang Shen became the top graduate in 1511, but was later involved in the Great Ritual Controversy in 1524 and was exiled to Yunnan for the rest of his life.<sup>62</sup> It was in Yunnan that we find his literary community.

In Yang’s song collection, we find a set of four *xiaoling* which follows the same format as those matching songs written by Kang and Wang. His third song in the set reads as follows:

<sup>60</sup> This, however, does not necessarily imply that Kang’s songs were composed before Wang’s.

<sup>61</sup> For Yang Shen’s role and influence on literary developments in Yunnan, see Tao Yingchang 1998, pp.90-4.

<sup>62</sup> On Yang’s life, see Nienhauser 1986, pp.913-5, and Feng Jiahua 1998.



Because of this illness, I have gotten rusty with strings and pipes.	病來生疏絃與管，
Winding water <sup>63</sup> carries flowers floating scattered.	曲水流花散。
The immortal maiden's <sup>64</sup> verse adds joys to our literary conversation, <sup>65</sup>	仙娥句笑鹽，
The eccentric guest's poem accompanies our meal. <sup>66</sup>	狂客詩嘲飯，
The bird messenger is too lazy to fly westwards to deliver letters. <sup>67</sup>	青鸞寄書西去懶。

How did Yang Shen, then banished to Yunnan, came to know about this specific rhyming pattern which was circulated in Shaanxi? The title of this song, “Kang Liangqing xishang he Duishang xianbei yun shiri shangyuan” 康良卿席上和對山先輩韻是日上元, provides us with some information. It not only tells us that the set of songs was written on the Shangyuan day (the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, also known as the Lantern Festival), but more importantly, that it was a piece written to match the rhymes of a senior master named Duishan, which is Kang Hai's style name.

We do not know exactly how Yang learnt about Kang's song and this specific template for writing to the tune of *Qingjiangyin*.<sup>68</sup> As the title also suggests, this set of songs by Yang Shen was composed at a banquet of a person named Kang Liangqing whom we know almost nothing about. Yang Shen once wrote another poem giving a send-off to Kang Liangqing who was to return to the Qin 秦 region. Thus, some

<sup>63</sup> This is a reference to the famous meeting at the Orchid Pavilion.

<sup>64</sup> A common term used to refer to singsong girls.

<sup>65</sup> This is a reference to an anecdote in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 in which Xie An asked his family at a gathering how one could describe the profuse falling white snow. Xie laughed with delight when his nephew replied that it was like scattering salt in mid-air, and his niece compared it with willow catkins rising on the wind.

<sup>66</sup> The wording reminds one of a line in Su Shi's poem titled “Xu Shijun fen xinhuo” 徐史君分新火 which reads “Only an elegant poem accompanies these grains of rice” 只有清詩嘲飯顆.

<sup>67</sup> The specific context behind this song is unclear. Complaints about the difficulty in sending a letter were quite common in the writings of both Yang Shen and his wife Huang O who were separated for a long period. Some examples are discussed in Ch'en and Mote 2002, pp.1-32.

<sup>68</sup> Yang could have read Kang's song collection *Pandong yuefu* printed around 1524 which contains those songs. Yang had also once sent his poem to Kang. See Yang, “Qiongyin pian: ji Kang Duishan” 瓊音篇寄康對山, cited from Feng 1998, p.219 note 1.

scholars speculate that Kang Liangqing might be a clansman of Kang Hai.<sup>69</sup>

In his matching song, Yang Shen stated he was following the rhymes of Kang Hai. However, we have observed earlier that it was actually not Kang, but Longqu who set the original rhyme characters, and that Kang was merely a follower of the same rhyme characters himself. We do not know whether Yang Shen was aware of the earlier history of the transmission of the songs, or whether he knew about Longqu at all. There are several possibilities: Yang might not have known about Longqu because he might have heard only about Kang's third set of matching songs which did not indicate Longqu's name. It is also possible that Yang knew that it was not Kang's original composition, but addressed his song-matching to Kang because of the social occasion (if Kang Liangqing was indeed related to Kang Hai), or simply because matching a song by a fellow top graduate like Kang Hai was more worth mentioning than matching to one written by someone like Longqu who was little known outside of the local Shaanxi region.

Regardless of the reasons, what we can gather from the texts passed down to us is that as the rhyming pattern moved trans-locally from Shaanxi to Yunnan, the name of Longqu, the original rhyme-setter, was lost in the process. Instead, it was Kang Hai's name which became attached to the specific pattern.

### *Stage Three: From Yang Shen to Other Writers in Yunnan*

Besides the set of four songs discussed above, Yang Shen also wrote another song using the same format. The song was left untitled in his first song collection, but was later added the titled "He Kang Duishan" 和康對山 (Matching Kang Duishan's Rhyme) in a later edition.<sup>70</sup> What is more significant is that in Yang's song collection, this song

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<sup>69</sup> Wang Wencai 1981, p.74.

<sup>70</sup> The song was included again with this new title in the sequel to Yang's first song collection. See *QMSQ*, p.1482, note 142. This sequel was said to be compiled by his students and contains very few new songs. Out of the eighty songs in the sequel, fifty were actually taken from the first collection. See Wang Wencai 1984, "Chuban shuomin" 出版說明, p.3.

was appended by two matching songs written by Zhang Han 張含 (1479-1565, *juren* 1507) and Wang Zongzheng 王宗正.<sup>71</sup>

Yang's attempt in writing a matching song using the rhyme of Kang (which can be traced back to Longqu) now became a model of its own for other writers in Yunnan to follow. This completed the process of trans-local transmission: a specific form of writing a song to the tune of *Qingjiangyin* using the four rhyme characters came to be practiced not only in the Shaanxi region where it first started, but even in Yunnan.

The circulation of the songs occurred in three stages on two different levels: local level in Shaanxi and also later in Yunnan, and trans-local level between the two regions. However, not all writers can transcend the local level and be known at the national level. The link between individual local communities relied on the major writers who belonged to a trans-local literati network. This specific rhyming pattern first used by an otherwise unknown Shaanxi writer (Longqu) might have been well known at that time in its local region, but it would probably be now lost without the matching songs by major writers such as Kang and Wang. It was Kang Hai's matching song that eventually enabled the pattern to spread beyond Shaanxi. Similarly, the local writers in Yunnan needed a major writer like Yang Shen who acted as a communication bridge between Yunnan and other regions using his literati network. In this respect, it is important to remember that Yang Shen also received a copy of Li's one hundred songs as discussed earlier.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In an attempt to find out how *sanqu* songs were transmitted beyond and received outside a local center of production, in this paper I have focused on the circulation of individual songs or sets of songs based on direct responses either in the form of colophons (or prefaces) or matching songs. These provide ample evidence of trans-local transmission across regions. The movement of texts and literary ideas was dependent on major writers such as Li Kaixian, Kang Hai, and

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<sup>71</sup> Yang Shen, *Taoqing yuefu*, 4:6b-7a; *QMSQ*, pp.1243, 1492. The song by Zhang Han is one of his two extant songs which are both matching pieces following the rhymes of Yang Shen. Wang Zongzheng's songs is his only extant *sanqu* we now have.

Yang Shen who were once national elites with a wide literati network, whereas other writers on a local level were sometimes lost in this process of trans-local transmission.

While this paper focuses on the transmission of song texts, there are other aspects of transmission that one has to consider, for example, through performance and anthologies. Since *sanqu* songs were meant to be sung and performed, they could also be transmitted orally through singsong girls or musicians. However, we know very little about how traveling performers helped to transmit songs, which is certainly an area that deserves more work. Traveling performers and musicians imply the possibility of performing particular subgenre of songs or drama. However, my impression from working with materials of this period is that trans-local transmission of songs relied more commonly on the circulation of texts across regions. We rarely read about a Ming literatus getting to know a new song of another writer through a performer. Rather, it was more often the case that one first received the text of a new song (again through one's literati network), and then passed on to his own private or local performers to perform.

*Qu* anthologies<sup>72</sup> acted as another significant medium for the transmission of songs. We can see an interesting interaction between the local and the trans-local aspects in anthologies as well. Often functioning as selections of the best and most popular songs, anthologies by nature are usually not only 'trans-local', such that they include writers from different regions, but they also often transcend the boundary of time since it was a common practice to include both Yuan and Ming dynasty songs in one volume. However, at the same time, many song anthologies also showed a local flavor. For example, the *qu* anthology *Nanbeigong ciji* 南北宮詞紀 (Compilation of Songs in the Southern and Northern Styles), compiled by Chen Suowen 陳所聞 (1526?-after 1605) who was a native of Nanjing, is most extensive in its selection of *sanqu* written by generations of Nanjing writers.

More work needs to be done on the role of song anthologies both as a medium for the circulation of song texts, and also as a site of writers' reputation. How widely were anthologies circulated in the Ming? Which songs and whose songs were selected? Answers to these

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<sup>72</sup> These include anthologies that select only *sanqu* songs, and also those that include both *sanqu* and dramatic arias.

questions would inform us on a more ‘impersonal’ dimension to the transmission of songs which would supplement the form of circulation based on personal networks as discussed in this paper.

#### ABBREVIATIONS:

*DMB*: Goodrich L. Carrington, and Chaoying Fang, eds. (1976) *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, New York: Columbia University Press.

*LKXQJ*: Bu Jian 卜鍵, ed., *Li Kaixian quanji* 李開先全集, Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2004.

*QMSQ*: Xie Boyang 謝伯陽, ed., *Quan Ming sanqu* 全明散曲, 5 vols., Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1993.

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- Wang Jiusi 王九思, *Bishan yuefu* 碧山樂府, with *Yuefu shiyi* 樂府拾遺 appended, *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 四庫全書存目叢書補編 edition.
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